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ART. IX. — *An Account of the Sect of Kaprías, by R. S. MONEY, Esq. (Communicated by the Bombay Branch Royal Asiatic Society).*

ON visiting Mhurr, in the year 1828, I was desirous of learning some particulars of the customs and history of the Kaprías; a sect so called from worshipping ΠΑΡΒΑΤÍ, one of whose names, taken by her on a particular occasion, is "*Kála Purí,*" or "*Káya Purí.*" In Cutch she is known under the name of "*Ásá Purá,*" and "*Mátá.*" The temple dedicated to her in this town is of great celebrity and antiquity, and endowed with many honors by the Ráos of Cutch. It boasts of no external beauty, is clumsily stuccoed over, and surrounded by buildings belonging to the Kaprías. These people superintend all affairs connected with the sacred establishment in the immediate neighbourhood, as well as those of several villages granted by the Ráos to the goddess.

The origin of this fraternity is involved, like that of all Hindú religious orders, in much obscurity. They pretend to have an associate of RÁMACHANDRA for their founder; who accompanied that deity, after his conquest of Ceylon, on a pilgrimage to Hinglás, on the borders of Makráu; and who was left by him, as they passed through Mhurr, to build a temple to ÁSÁRURÁ, and form this sect by her especial order. The monstrous image, which is the object of their adoration, is said to have started from the bowels of the earth in its present shape; and LÁLÁ JAS RÁJ (the founder's name) erected a building over it. It appears to be an immense block of uncarved stone, six feet high, and as many broad; the lower part of which has two uncomely swellings, like the deformed breasts of a woman; and from above these grows a huge excrescence, very similar in shape to a leg of mutton. I could gain no reasonable information respecting this extraordinary figure: it had been there, I was told, ever since the Trétáyug. A long period of darkness follows in their history, after the death of LÁLÁ JAS RÁJ; and nothing of note seems to have occurred, excepting instances of their presiding deity's interference, on several occasions, for the reputation, safety, or success of her established servants. It is affirmed, that they enjoyed the protection of RÁJÁ GADÁ SANKAR, father of VIKRAMÁJÍT, the Asiatic VULCAN; who, on being cast from heaven, for his mal-practices, by his parent INDRA, fell on the land of Cutch in the form of a jackass (whence his title), and assumed, after a series of wonderful adven-

tures, the government of the country, until his return to the celestial regions.

As the tales connected with this hero are curious, and current among the natives, and as there is a coin found in some old ruins with unknown characters on it, attributed to his time, and called by his name, I have sent a short account of him with this paper. The Kaprías, however, remained unnoticed after this until the days of ΡΑΟ ΚΗΓΓΑΡΓΙ΄s father, who, when in great distress, vowed all the honors in his power to ΑΣΑΡΟΥΑ, should he ever extricate himself from them: and, on his success, fulfilled his vow most satisfactorily. He made a pilgrimage to Mhurr; gave the title of ΡΑΪΑ to the guardian of the temple; endowed it with the grant of several villages; and, during his life, at different times, bestowed large sums of money for the use of the brotherhood. From that period the fame of the sect has much increased; and the ΡΑΪΑ shares nearly equal honors with his protectress. The Ράος of Cutch are not thought secure on the throne until they perform a journey to this sacred spot; and the guardian ΡΑΪΑ never rises when his king does him the honor of a visit. All ranks and castes pay the ΡΑΪΑ extraordinary attention. While Cutch was overrun by the troops of FATEH MUHAMMED, who cared little for the privileges or prejudices of other religious orders, he strictly refrained from violating those of the Kaprías. They have lost all their books, which were taken to Sindh by GHOLAM SHAH, who plundered their temple and the town of Mhurr in 1819. A large bell, the largest I have seen in India next to the bell of St. Thomé, was also carried away by the Sindhian marauder, but restored (on the threatenings and interposition of ΑΣΑΡΟΥΑ) to its former abode, where it now hangs, and is an object of great veneration and wonder. The constitution of this establishment is singular, and not unlike that of monasteries in Europe. The number of Kaprías is limited to one hundred and twenty or one hundred and thirty. They are bound by the most solemn obligations to a life of celibacy; and all their domestic concerns are managed without the aid of women, however nearly related. On the death of a member they select some one to succeed him from a Hindú caste, and they admit members to their community at any age above eight or nine years. The new brother is brought into the assembly; his Μάταπα, or tuft of hair is cut off, and the peculiar cap of the order placed on his head; he is presented to ΑΣΑΡΟΥΑ, receives the congratulations of those around him, drinks the Kusumbá (a draught of liquefied opium) with them, and joins in the feast given on the occasion of his entrance into the service of the goddess. If young, he has little to learn but the art of

begging, and the proper mode of making his prayers acceptable to *Ásátruná*.

Excepting the *Rájá* few can write or read, nor are they ever taught such qualifications on becoming a *Kapría*. They eat and sleep together; they do no labour in the fields, although possessing some fine and rich land. Some of the most reputable members are stationed in each village with *Banyás* as their *Kámdárs* or men of business, who superintend the cultivation and the accounts. The revenue derived from the five villages which they possess, together with what is collected by the mendicants of the order, and the sum due to the *Rájá* from a tax on the alum made at *Mhurr*, is all expended in charity. No beggar goes from their gates with an empty stomach, of whatever caste he may be, *Musulmáns*, *Mungs*, or *Dérs*; a cowry's worth of opium is always ready for travellers or visitors of high rank and respectability; and a regular allowance is laid aside for feeding all descriptions of animals. Their own food is like that of *Hindús*, the simple food of the country.

They have no particular festivals, but hold those days sacred which are so among the natives of the country. *Hinglás* is their holy land, and every *Kapría* is obliged, if he possibly can, to make a pilgrimage thither once in his life time. He must not stay there more than twelve hours, and those are the twelve hours of night. If day dawn on him, then he believes that *Ásátruná* will either cast him into the sea, or make away with him in some mysterious manner. They do not burn, but bury their dead. The *Rájá* only has the honor of a funeral pile after his death. The twelfth day following is a day of feasting and rejoicing, and the relatives of the deceased are invited to partake in the merry-making. The succession, on the demise of the *Rájá*, is secured by previous adoption. The present *Rájá* is an old man, and has been at the head of the establishment for thirty-four or thirty-five years. I asked them if they had any *múrti* or apotheosis of *LÁLÁ JAS RÁJ*? They said, no; but that they worshipped him in the shape of the *Ling*, and took me up to a figure of that description. In what way it was connected with the history of their founder I could not discover; and their life of celibacy made the worship of such an emblem the more curious. The most productive villages round *Mhurr* belong to this sect; and more activity and signs of comfort and opulence are to be seen in them than in any villages in the *Ráo's* dominions.

(Signed) R. C. MONEY.